

Mean Mom in Awe

My mom passed away two months ago. I have not been the same since. Not just because I lost her, but because of what I learned about my two college age sons.

The first thing they each said when I told them of her aggressive cancer diagnosis was, “How soon can I go see her”, halfway across the country. Neither had the time or money and neither gave it a second thought. They spent an entire weekend devoted to creating last memories with her, building a snowman in her front yard as she watched from inside with her oxygen and cane until she couldn't contain herself anymore and ran out in socks to have a picture taken with them and the now famous snowman. They baked Christmas cookies and threw pieces of dough at each other until she joined in laughing. When they had to say their final good-byes, both were incredibly strong.

I raised my boys as President of the Mean Mom's Club, with a plan to teach responsibility and compassion. Sometimes they called me mean when I refused to give in to things that I knew were unsafe or against the family's values. This recent experience taught me that I was successful beyond my highest goals for them. I am in awe of these compassionate young men who are my sons.

In a world where we continually hear about young people getting into trouble and being focused on just themselves, this is a story that needs to be shared.

How did they become responsible and compassionate rather than self-focused? I believe this is learned behavior and I believe that being a “mean mom” with a plan taught them that behavior. No, I don't mean a mom who is a tyrant or who uses physical punishment. A true mean mom is one who knows from the beginning what kind of person she wants her child to become, creates a plan to get him/her there, and sticks to that plan all the way through, no matter what. That's not easy to do. It's exhausting, it's frustrating, and heart breaking at times. But if you have a plan to follow, you can get through it. And when you find yourself looking at such amazing young people as my sons, every hour of lost sleep, every tear, and every gray hair was worth it.

If your goal is to raise kids to be responsible, compassionate adults, you need to plan how you will teach that throughout each stage of their development. As kids grow physically, they also grow emotionally and cognitively. That means they focus on different things in different stages and can only understand certain things at those stages. For a mom that means teaching new behaviors and values as they grow.

- Infants need to feel their needs will be met and that they have a positive social connection.
 - Meet his needs when he expresses them. Making a baby wait teaches only that his needs will not be met.
 - Talk to your baby and keep her in your presence when awake, in a walker, swing, etc.
- Toddlers need to learn to explore their world and realize others share that world.
 - Allow independence but stay close while she explores and learns to be around others.
 - Keep him safe when his emotions are out of control and keep your own emotions in check to help balance and calm him.
- Preschoolers need to learn to include others in their world.
 - Arrange social experiences, especially if not in pre-school.
 - Focus on the cause and effect of the situation (when you do this, this is what happens).
- School age kids need to learn to socialize with different types of people and accept their differences.
 - Use logical explanations that include actions and consequences.
 - Involve them in team or group activities.
- Teenagers need to learn that other's needs sometimes come before theirs.
 - Assign responsibilities to younger siblings such as helping with homework.
 - Get them involved in some type of volunteer experience.
 - If old enough, find a part time job, even for a few hours per week.

As you watch your kids grow through each stage, create opportunities to teach them to be responsible and compassionate within their understanding and focus. Plan ahead for what you can provide that matches your family's values. You will be in awe of the result!

The author, Maureen LoBue, M.Ed., has combined both personal and professional experience to create *Mean Mom's Club: The Mom's Rule Book*. The purpose is to provide a common sense foundation for parents to take charge of any given situation by using the rules to plan ahead. The seven rules prepare parents to deal with situations at different ages for different children, using their own parenting style. The book is available at www.amazon.com.

The Mean Mom Coaching Program is an online membership program that helps parents create their own concrete plan using planning guides and conference calls for questions and support.

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